

27 September 1967

BRIEFING NOTES
FOR [REDACTED]

STATINTL

SOUTH VIETNAM ELECTIONS

1. Presidential and senatorial elections of 3 September were among the most successful held in South Vietnam. Out of a possible electorate estimated to be some 8.5 million, 69 percent--or 5.8 million--were registered, and 4.8 million--or 83 percent--of those registered voted (i.e., about 57% of eligibles cast their votes).

2. The elections were generally conceded to have been conducted in a free and fair manner. There was ample provision in the electoral laws governing both contests to give all concerned an opportunity to observe the electoral procedures and register complaints. Poll watchers, for example, were allowed for each presidential ticket or slate of senatorial candidates, and there is evidence that they were widely used.

3. At least 15 complaints were registered against the results of the presidential race--but it does not appear that they are of sufficient magnitude to prevent the validation next week of president-elect Nguyen Van Thieu's victory.

4. In the case of the Senate race, the results of which have already been confirmed, one complaint uncovered a clerical error in vote tabulations. As a result, the complainant's slate was declared one of the six winners, and another slate which had previously been announced as elected was displaced.

5. There were 11 presidential candidates--only one representing the military--and 480 senatorial candidates running on 48 10-man slates. The Senate will be composed of six of these slates. The large number of candidates, fundamentally, is largely the result of a political unsophisticated society experimenting with the democratic institution of an open and free election. Lacking well-developed political parties, to say nothing of the tradition of a two-party system of government, the presidential election was open to all. This situation worked to the advantage of Thieu and Ky, and undoubtedly was encouraged by them to split anti-military votes.

6. In the end, the Thieu-Ky ticket won a plurality of 38.4 percent of the votes (approximately 1.6 million votes), with the runner-up, the controversial "peace candidate" Truong Dinh Dzu, garnering about 317,000 votes, or 17.2 percent of the votes cast. The next closest contender,

Pham Khac Suu, received only 10.8 percent of the ballots cast. Tran Van Huong, the reputed civilian front-runner, was an also-ran with 10 percent.

7. Despite the fact that a military-backed slate won the presidential race, it did not pull in a large number of military men on its coat tails. In all, there were only 41 military men running in the senate race, including seven retired officers. Three of the winning senate slates had no military men. One winning slate, headed by the popular retired General Tran Van Don, contained a total of four retired officers. Another winning ticket carried three retired officers and one on active service, while a third slate had one officer on active duty. Military officers during the election campaign were required to go on leave without pay, and presumably will be required to resign their commissions to serve in the senate.

8. There will probably be new and continuing charges of fraud and irregularities because of the religious composition of the Senate. The Catholic minority has at least 29 of the 60 seats. This is probably attributable, however, to the fact that the South Vietnamese Catholics are not only more politically conscious, as a heritage from Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, but better organized and better

disciplined than the Buddhist majority. The fact that a majority of South Vietnamese are nominal Buddhists does not mean that all these Buddhists are activists or even active politically as Buddhists.